

Sheltrown Bill
Substitute for HB #4410

Good Morning. I am Mark Bielang, superintendent of Paw Paw Public Schools and a member of the Van Buren Legislative Consortium and Michigan Small and Rural Schools. I have been in my position for 14 years having previously served as a high school principal and assistant principal. My undergraduate preparation was in industrial education. My graduate work in administration centered on what was then known as Vocational Technical Education. Prior to embarking on my administrative journey I spent six years in the classroom...the last five as a building trade's instructor.

I come here today in support of the proposed amendment to House Bill 4410.

As I look back on my days as a classroom teacher and think about the students I taught, I know that, had it not been for being able to learn in a work related environment, many of those young men and women would not have completed their high school graduation requirements. As I observe students today, I'm fearful that many of students are being forced to choose between classes that will just fill requirements...IF they can pass them... and classes which will set them on a career path that aligns with their talents and abilities. The obstacle, in many cases, is this traditional algebra II requirement. I do not believe that our students are best served by forcing them to choose classes which, in the end, will prepare them neither for college nor for entry in to the work force.

The career and technical education that students receive today is not the same as it was when I taught. Technology, increased expectations and the influence of the global economy have each contributed to making sure that what students learn today prepares them for today's world. I have witnessed, first hand, the work that teachers and administrators have put in to imbedding and integrating language arts, science, and math content into almost all Career and Technical Education courses offered in our Technology Center. To say that the practical application and understanding of certain "academic" content is somehow less meaningful to students is a disservice to them and the many critical careers that Career and Technical Education represents. When I call my local heating and cooling contractor to design a cooling system for my house, I don't care whether he or she learned the math necessary to make calculations in a traditional math class or in a CTE class...I only care that they are done correctly and the system works.

I have confidence that our high academic standards will not be compromised if we have this flexibility in how students negotiate through our course offerings. For many students, CTE classes are a launching point for post-secondary studies. I want to make sure that students are able to enroll in CTE classes as soon as they are available to them. This amendment, I believe, will make it easier for students to enroll in classes that best meet their career goals.

We've been asked, as educators, to re-imagine how to improve learning for all students.

I am asking you, as legislators, to re-imagine legislation that supports the Michigan Merit Curriculum and enables us, as educators, to create a viable means for CTE students to meet the high standards and spirit of the law's intent.

Thank You.